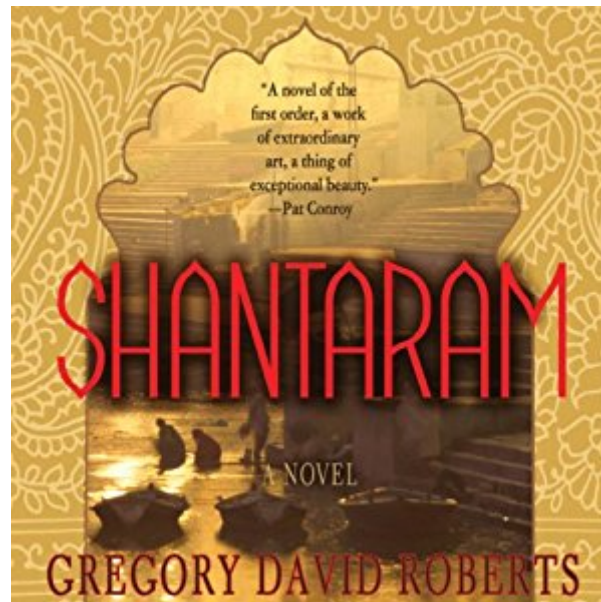


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Shantaram: A Novel



Synopsis

"It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured." So begins this epic, mesmerizing first novel set in the underworld of contemporary Bombay. Shantaram is narrated by Lin, an escaped convict with a false passport who flees maximum-security prison in Australia for the teeming streets of a city where he can disappear. Accompanied by his guide and faithful friend Prabaker, the two enter Bombay's hidden society of beggars and gangsters, prostitutes and holy men, soldiers and actors, and Indians and exiles from other countries, who seek in this remarkable place what they cannot find elsewhere. As a hunted man without a home, family, or identity, Lin searches for love and meaning while running a clinic in one of the city's poorest slums, and serving his apprenticeship in the dark arts of the Bombay mafia. The search leads him to war, prison torture, murder, and a series of enigmatic and bloody betrayals. The keys to unlock the mysteries and intrigues that bind Lin are held by two people. The first is Khader Khan: mafia godfather, criminal-philosopher-saint, and mentor to Lin in the underworld of the Golden City. The second is Karla: elusive, dangerous, and beautiful, whose passions are driven by secrets that torment her and yet give her a terrible power. Burning slums and five-star hotels, romantic love and prison agonies, criminal wars and Bollywood films, spiritual gurus and mujaheddin guerrillas - this huge novel has the world of human experience in its reach, and a passionate love for India at its heart. Based on the life of the author, it is by any measure the debut of an extraordinary voice in literature.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 43 hours and 2 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Macmillan Audio

Audible.com Release Date: December 10, 2013

Language: English

ASIN: B00GT1LVKW

Best Sellers Rank: #91 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Action & Adventure #801 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Action & Adventure #856 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

I have, in the last three years, read literally hundreds of books of fiction. I can quite easily list the three bodies of work which were the most enjoyable, instructive, and otherwise influential to me. In order they are: 1) the entire 21 book series of Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey/Maturin historic naval literature (probably the best series of books I have ever read), 2) the three books of Neal Stephenson's Baroque Cycle (Quicksilver, The Confusion, and the System of the World), each book being better than the previous one, and 3) Shantaram. Shantaram is a love story from start to finish: love of mankind, love of friends, love of a woman, love of a country, love of a city, love of an adversary, love of a way of life, love of a people, love of adventure, love of a father, and, most apparent, love for the reader. The protagonist (based on the writer himself) is a complex adventurer with a deep soul and a past which, though you and I can never fully appreciate it unless we have done similar things (highly unlikely...few of us have ever been tortured, for example, or kicked a heroin habit twice) is made accessible to us, complete with its feelings and lessons. The writing is superb, the characters have depth, the setting descriptions place you right there, the plots are intriguing, and the emotions, including humor, I cannot adequately describe, since I have nowhere near the skills of the writer, Gregory Roberts. I cannot recommend the book more highly. Please do yourself a favor and read it.

Shantaram is one of those books that you wait to find for five years, even a decade. You know how it is. You read a really great book and, on coming to the end page, immediately want to find another book just as good to fill its place. So you go out looking for such a book, but cannot find it. You look for a week, then a month, then months turn to years, and finally, 5 to 10 years later, you finally find a book that is a really great read. Shantaram is such a book. It is an A+ story that captivates you on page one and sustains the pace through every one of its 920 pages. It overflows with a wide range of characters of every moral persuasion, good and bad. And it is rich with the big themes on the nature of humanity and the human struggle to survive and thrive, for better or worse. In addition, the actual writing is superb, descriptive and often beautiful, without ever descending into sentimental or maudlin. Roberts always manages to find the right phrase or word to bring into clear focus the incredible wide range of experiences he paints. I might add, this is one book that I do not want to see as a movie, because there is no way that a mere movie could be a fraction as good as this glorious, three dimensional work. I'll be lucky if I have to wait only another 5 - 10 years to find another book this good.

It's just not fair. Gregory David Roberts is one of the best writers of our time, and I do not make that statement lightly. I am usually a 350-400 page novel-reader -- I like to get in and get out. But after reading the first paragraph (I dare you to read it and NOT be interested in seeing where he goes), I couldn't stop thinking about it. Actually, I read the first paragraph in *Borders*, put it down and went home. I simply didn't want to start a 900 page novel. But I couldn't get the passage out of my head the whole night, and returned the next day to purchase it. This book is magical. It reads like the best non-fiction adventure novel (!) ever written. I gave the book to my dad for his birthday and about a month later asked him how it was going. He told me that he had 100 pages left but hadn't read in two weeks because he "didn't want it to end." Instead of a synopsis of the book, which is available in so many places, I thought I'd tell you my thoughts about the book and how it impacted me and those around me. I hope it helps. I tell everyone about this book and always say the same two things: 1) Don't let the 900 pages scare you. 2) Read the first paragraph. If you aren't interested in that, don't go on. But if that paragraph doesn't inspire you, I have no idea why you read in the first place. You can read the first page here on .

This is a wonderful story for the first nineteen chapters; after that it changes and it's not nearly as good. The "change" is sudden and unexpected. You will enjoy the first nineteen chapters, the first 400 pages of this 900 page book, and you won't take my advice to stop reading at that point, as I was advised to do. You will read on, as I did, expecting the magic and charm to return, and even when they don't you'll want to tie up all those loose strings. The first nineteen chapters are a book about India. We read this for my book club, and we were fortunate to have a guest who had grown up in India, to answer our questions about all the strange and fantastic things this white, Australian, ex-con author was telling us. It turns out that what he wrote about Indian ways and culture is true, and our guest even demonstrated the Indian head waggle! This story offers more than an intimate glimpse at India; it is also a provocative lesson on redemption for all sins, not just the ones that can land you in a jail. It also offers a few lessons on love. But after chapter nineteen the story is no longer really about India, and the main character, Lin, is no longer a "normal" man in extraordinary circumstances. Lin becomes a kind of superman involved in one cliff-hanging circumstance after another. The story and the characters are no longer endearing; they become larger-than-life cardboard "heroes" in an action movie. The reader no longer learns anything of value about India or the characters. And that's too bad, because it didn't have to go that way; there was enough going in the first 400 pages to carry it every bit as well to 900. I will mention, too, that Gregory Roberts could write a compelling story about being in prison, if Australian prisons really are as bad as he claims.

Perhaps he will.

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